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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000080

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINS KDEM IZ

SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: THE DEPUTY GOVERNOR RETURNS TO THE RACE

REF: 08 BAGHDAD 3893

Classified By: PRT Leader Rick Bell for reasons 1.4 (a) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Salah ad Din reporting cable.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: Following a successful last-minute appeal of his disqualification from provincial elections on de-Ba'athification grounds, Salah ad Din (SaD) Deputy Governor Abdullah Hussein Mohammed Jebara is now on the ballot for provincial elections in SaD. In a meeting with the PRT, Abdullah was optimistic about his chances in the election, but said that he has many enemies who will try to damage his efforts. His campaign has a very visible presence, and seems to enjoy support from important SaD Sheikhs. However, allegations of campaign corruption and intimidation by Abdullah have the potential to undermine public confidence in the democratic process. END SUMMARY.

DISQUALIFIED THEN REINSTATED

¶3. (C) SaD Deputy Governor Abdullah Hussein Jebara was initially disqualified from running in the 2009 provincial elections due to Ba'athist connections; the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) had refused to accept a letter from Ahmed Chalabi, Chair of the De-Ba'athification Committee, exonerating Abdullah (reftel). During the Saddam era, he held a high-level (Firqa) position in the Ba'ath Party, and was a deputy division commander during the 2003 invasion. According to an SaD source, Abdullah was arrested by Coalition Forces (CF) in 2003, but was released within 24 hours due to intervention with CF by a relative.

¶4. (C) After Abdullah was disqualified from participating in the elections, the Deputy Governor's appeal was referred to the Court of Cassation, the body empowered to over-rule de-Ba'athification decisions (reftel). However Abdullah subsequently informed the PRT he had received another letter from Ahmed Chalabi which IHEC accepted, and on which basis it reinstated Abdullah's candidacy. He did not have to pursue the appeal process.

A CONFIDENT RETURN TO CAMPAIGNING

¶5. (C) In a January 5 meeting, Deputy Governor Abdullah told the PRT that he was glad to be back in the provincial elections race. Although his initial disqualification had led many to think he wasn't running, his active campaigning has made "everyone" aware he is back. He is running with the Front for the Iraqi National Project party. His campaign relies on billboards, posters and TV spots. (NOTE: The day after Abdullah was cleared to run, his posters were seen hanging far and wide. END NOTE). Abdullah's campaign posters appear to be of higher quality and more numerous than many of his rivals' -- some of whom have privately accused him of funding his printing costs via corruption. Abdullah

told the PRT that donations are funding his campaign, and volunteered that appreciative contractors to whom he has awarded projects are one of his sources.

¶16. (SBU) Abdullah considers himself the most popular political figure in the province, and claims many other candidates will tell their supporters to vote for him. He seems to have a solid base of support: a straw poll of over 900 people in his hometown of Al-Alam revealed him as the top choice among the town's three leading candidates.

¶17. (C) Other influential SaD residents have privately voiced support for Abdullah to the PRT. Sheikh Naef Ali Mohammed of the Albu-Saef tribe told the PRT that although he belongs to a different tribe, he supports Abdullah and may tell his tribe to vote for the Deputy Governor. Naef said that he respects Abdullah because he is a strong leader, because Abdullah brought Saddam Hussein's body from Baghdad to Tikrit for burial after his execution, and because SaD tribal leaders still have great respect for Sheikh Naji, Abdullah's older brother and formerly the Juboori tribe's top sheikh in SaD (NOTE: Naji was assassinated in 2007 END NOTE). Sheikh Hassan Nida Hussein Al-Nassiry, another powerful tribal leader in SaD (and one of Saddam Hussein's close relatives), expressed similar sentiments.

ABDULLAH'S DETRACTORS

¶18. (C) Abdullah also has detractors who do not support his candidacy, even within his own tribe. Ra'id Khutab (strictly

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protect throughout), a strong PRT contact and a member of the Juboori tribe from the same hometown (Al-Alam) as the Deputy Governor, recently offered the PRT a detailed account of the Jebara family's rise. Ra'id alleges that Abdullah and his associates have maneuvered themselves into the most powerful and sensitive positions in the provincial government.

Qahtan Hamada Saleh (strictly protect throughout), the Governor's Assistant for Technical Affairs, separately corroborated Ra'id's account. He added that the head of the National Security office in SaD has threatened to arrest him (Qahtan) in the past because Abdullah sees Qahtan as a political rival. (COMMENT: Qahtan has registered to run for PC on a list separate from Abdullah's. Note however that the exemption that Abdullah obtained from the De-Ba'athification Commission also covered Qahtan. END COMMENT.)

¶19. (C) Dr. Hatim Abdulhamid, IHEC's Governorate Elections Officer in SaD, also complained to the PRT about Abdullah's monopoly on power in SaD. Hatim believes that one-man control is not good for the province, since one-man control under Saddam led to Iraq's downfall. This is a common criticism, which Abdullah acknowledged in a recent USA Today story, stating "Some call me a small dictator; I say I'm a decisive man."

¶10. (U) Critics and supporters agree that Abdullah is the most powerful figure in SaD, as he is the leader of the largest and most influential tribe in the province, the Juboori. Also, he is surrounded by a group of family members and close associates who hold the most powerful and sensitive security and administrative positions in the provincial government.

ALLEGATIONS OF ELECTION INTIMIDATION

¶11. (C) The PRT has received reports that Abdullah uses his powerful position to intimidate political rivals. In early December 2008, members of the Arab National Bloc (ANB) and the National Movement for Reform and Development parties in

SaD accused Abdullah and the head of the SaD Police Department Counterterrorism Unit, Major Ahmed Fahal, of political harassment. Abdullah and Ahmed were reportedly shutting these parties' offices without warning, detaining the office guards, and verbally threatening party members. The alleged reasons for targeting the parties were the ANB's (reputed) affiliation with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the National Movement for Reform and Development party's perceived connections to Iran.

¶12. (C) In mid-December 2008 Iraqi President Jalal Talabani reportedly sent a personal message to the Iraqi Army Commander in SaD requesting that he persuade Abdullah and Ahmed to stop their actions. Although some of the overt political harassment reportedly stopped after the Commander's intervention, ANB's campaign posters were still being torn down and the SaD TV station refused to accept ANB advertisements. Efforts from another branch of the Juboori tribe appeared to have calmed the situation: ANB has reopened its office in Tikrit and has put up large campaign displays that as of now have not been disturbed.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) Deputy Governor Abdullah Hussein Jebara is a strong leader who has been a force for stability in SaD. A seemingly well-financed campaign and strong tribal support suggest he will do well in the elections. But reports of his actions during the campaign and his Ba'athist history call into question his suitability for governing in SaD: his corruption and intimidation have the potential to undermine Qcorruption and intimidation have the potential to undermine the public's confidence in the democratic process. Ultimately, SaD voters will determine whether they consider Abdullah a "small dictator" or, as he prefers to say, a "decisive man." END COMMENT.

CROCKER